

**Claire Breukel**

**AsgarGabriels' Autonomous Universe ...and other such Anti-Art Gestures**

AsgarGabriel are renowned for imagining epic dioramas depicting youthful bacchanals and menacing fantasy-play. Combining the conventional canvas and references to history painting with the language of mass media and advertising, their works are grand narratives of multifarious image-appropriation that simultaneously titillate and unnerve.

Developing their role as provocateurs, *Armed With Fever And Good Health*, takes us on an exploration in to the techniques and consciously absurdist world of Dadaism. Now, using collage, assemblage, abstraction, Cubism and reductionism in their repertoire of technical references, AsgarGabriel create progressively abstract dioramas that emote a sense of seduction and imminent despair in increasingly tactile ways. The dark epic, "*we are hungry in fact very hungry*," conflates images of death, Christ's resurrection and present-day characters on what purposefully appears to be a found sheet of cardboard. "Manet's Leg" is a montage recreation of *The Luncheon On The Grass* that dually tells the story of Edouard Manet's amputation as one's eye is led to a painting of a leg mimetically placed in separation to the tiered central scene.

Also in this work a man leans on a Penny-farthing bicycle. This poses a new timeframe and context that disjoints the narrative, making the viewer aware that they are looking upon an imagined universe that is an autonomous space. Dada artist Kurt Schwitters describes his view of image-making stating, "The picture is a self-sufficient work of art. It is not connected to anything outside." Cut canvasses, disjointed shapes and sprawling painting installations increases AsgarGabriels' deviation from linearity, adding to an already sublime expression. Armed with fever and good health, AsgarGabriels' role is now of provocative visual instigators whose universes are both fantastical and anarchic.

Philosopher Denis Diderot viewed the ruin, and images made of ruins, as being paradoxically irregular and incomplete but also fascinating and strongly emotive—suggesting their desecrated state offered a (perverse) sense of gratification, and ultimately positioned the image of the ruin as sublime.<sup>1</sup> AsgarGabriels' distorted and epic imaginations depict both despair and erotica evoking a similar sense of the sublime with this paradox. Their lusciously rendered characters, neon brilliance and dramatic epic narratives belie a macabre undertone that explores dark desire, greed and death. By moving beyond the canvas grid, the works in *Armed With Fever And Good Health* become increasingly sculptural, challenging a formal reading of the depicted history paintings and placing the viewer in an unknown world where a conventional metaphorical and physical reading of the work is disrupted. In this way AsgarGabriel create an experience that activates the exhibition as an environment, placing the viewer, quite literally, amidst the drama. By adopting a Dadaist sensibility, it can be argued that *Armed With Fever And Good Health* is proof that painting has become, ironically, anti-art.

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Betty Weinshenker; Diderot's Use of the Ruin; Diderot Studies, Vol. 16; 1973, p. 355; Librairie Droz.